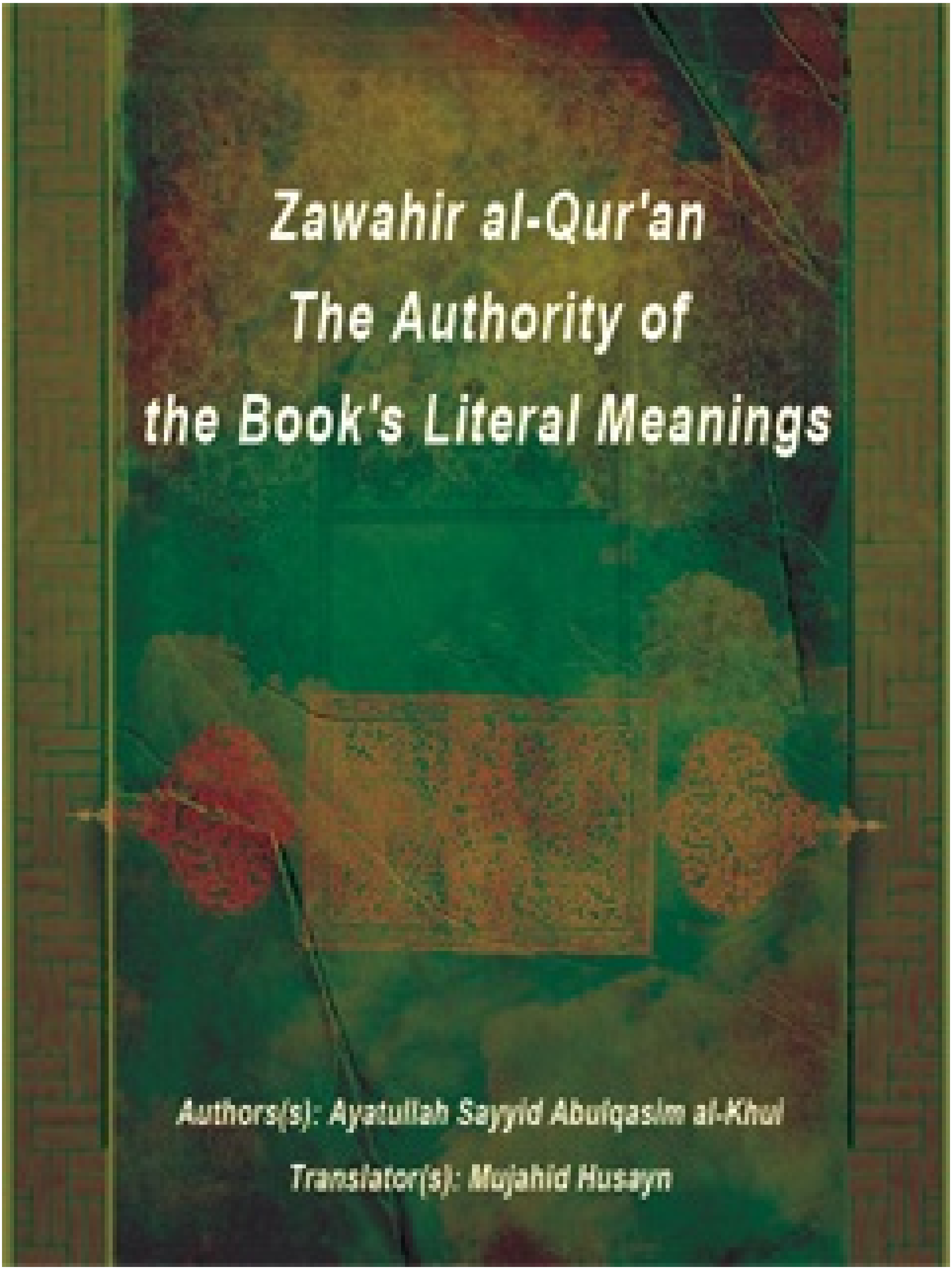

Zawahir al-Qur'an
The Authority of
the Book's Literal Meanings
Authors(s): Ayatullah Sayyid Abulqasim al-Khui
Translator(s): Mujahid Husayn

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Importance of the literal meanings of the Qur'an and examples of its use by the Ahlul .Bayt (a). Arguments against the literal meanings. Methodology and sources of tafsir

Zawahir al-Qur'an: The Authority of the Book's Literal Meanings

point

by Ayatullah al-`Uzma al-Sayyid Abu al-Qasim al-Khu'i

Translated from the Arabic by Mujahid Husayn

The author is one of the maraji (legal authorities) of the Shi'i world and one of the most eminent figures in the world of contemporary Islamic scholarship. The translation given here is that of two chapters from his work on Qur'anic exegesis, al-Bayan fi tafsir al-Qur'an : "hujjiyat zawahir al-Qur'an," (the authority of the Qur'anic .(zawahir), and "usul al-tafsir" (the principles of exegesis

Two terms need to be understood in regard to the Qur'anic meaning: nusus (sing, nass) and zawahir (sing. zahir). By nusus is meant those Quranic texts which are absolutely clear, being of a single meaning, about which there is no ambiguity

whatsoever. The term zawahir refers to those meanings which are the most obvious, although the text may have another, less probable, meaning besides its apparent sense. Although zawahir has been translated here as 'literal meanings' which applies .to nusus as well the difference between nusus and zawahir should be noted

There is no doubt that the Prophet (S) did not innovate any special method for conveying his message; he spoke to the people by applying the modes of expression to which they were habituated. He

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brought the Qur'an to them that they may understand it, contemplate over its verses, follow its commands and refrain from what it prohibits. This message often recurs in :the verses of the Qur'an

أَفَلَا يَتَدَبَّرُونَ الْقُرْآنَ أَمْ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبٍ أَقْفَالُهَا

What, do they not contemplate over the Qur'an? Or is it that there are locks upon" (their hearts?" (۴۷:۲۴

وَلَقَدْ ضَرَبْنَا لِلنَّاسِ فِى هَٰذَا الْقُرْآنِ مِن كُلِّ مَثَلٍ لَّعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ

Indeed we have struck for the people in this Qur'an every manner of similitude; haply" (they will remember. "(۳۹:۲۷

وَإِنَّهُ لَتنزِيلُ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ نَزَلَ بِهِ الرُّوحُ الْأَمِينُ عَلَىٰ قَلْبِكَ لِتَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُنذِرِينَ بِلِسَانٍ عَرَبِيٍّ مُّبِينٍ

Truly it is the revelation of the Lord of all Being, brought down by the Trustworthy " Spirit upon thy heart in a clear Arabic language, that thou mayest be one of the (warners. "(۲۶:۱۹۲-۱۹۵

هَٰذَا بَيَانٌ لِّلنَّاسِ وَهُدًى وَمَوْعِظَةٌ لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ

This is an exposition for mankind, and a guidance and admonition for the God-" (fearing. "(۳:۱۳۸

فَإِنَّمَا يَسَّرْنَاهُ بِلِسَانِكَ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ

(Thus have We made it easy on your tongue, that haply they may remember. "(۴۴:۵۸"

وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا الْقُرْآنَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِن مُّدَّكِرٍ

And We have made the Qur'an easy for remembrance. Is there any one that will" (remember? "(۵۴:۱۷

أَفَلَا يَتَدَبَّرُونَ الْقُرْآنَ ۚ وَلَوْ كَانَ مِنْ عِندِ غَيْرِ اللَّهِ لَوَجَدُوا فِيهِ اخْتِلَافًا كَثِيرًا

And what, do they not contemplate over the Qur'an? And had it been from someone"

(other than God, they would have found in it much inconsistency." (۴:۸۲

Apart from these verses, there are other verses as well which prove the obligatoriness (wujub) of acting in accordance with

the contents of the Qur'an and the necessity of accepting the literal meanings of its .verses

Following arguments prove the authoritativeness (hujjiyyah) of the literal meanings of .the Qur'an as comprehended by the Arabs

1. The Qur'an's revelation as a proof of prophethood and the Prophet's (S) challenge to all mankind to bring a single surah of its kind, both imply that the Arabs used to understand the literal meaning of the Qur'an. Had the Qur'an spoken in riddles, it wouldn't have been correct to challenge them regarding it, nor its miraculous character would have been proved to them, because they could not have understood it. It would have also contradicted the purpose for which the Qur'an was revealed and .its invitation to mankind to believe in it

2. There are ample traditions commanding adherence to `the two Weighty Things' (al-Thaqalayn, which are the Qur'an and the Ahl al Bayt,) that the Prophet (S) left behind for the Muslims. Here, evidently, the meaning of adhering to the Qur'an is to grasp its message and to act in accordance with it, and there is no other meaning .apart from this

3. There are mutawatir traditions (i.e. traditions narrated by so many different chains of transmission as to establish their authenticity beyond doubt) which order that traditions be checked against the Qur'an; those which contradict it should be rejected as invalid or false, as those whose acceptance is prohibited, because they are not the .(words of (the Prophet [S] or) the Imams (A

These traditions categorically prove the canonical authority of the literal meanings of the Qur'an, i.e. the meanings as understood by the ordinary speakers of the language familiar with the literary (fasih) Arabic language. To this category also belong those traditions which order the correlation of contractual conditions with the Qur'an and .rejection of those opposing it

The arguments of the Imams (A) regarding some rules of the Shari'ah, as well as .۴ other things, in which they have argued by applying the verses of the Qur'an. .Following are some examples

a. There is the exposition of al-'Imam al-Sadiq (A) when Zurarah questioned him, "How do you understand that mash, (the ritual wiping, of the head or the feet during wudu') of (only) a part of the head is required?" The Imam (A) replied, "From the ba'," in the verse . وامسحوا بروئسكم

b. Another example, is his prohibiting Hisham al-Dawaniqi from accepting a :slanderer's report, because such a person is a fasiq (evildoer), and the Qur'an says

إِن جَاءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌ بِنَبَإٍ فَتَبَيَّنُوا

(If an ungodly (fasiq) person comes to you with a tiding, verify it ..." (۴۹:۶"

c. Among the arguments is his (A) warning a person who had prolonged his stay in the toilet to listen to prohibited music, on the excuse that he had not intentionally come ,for listening to it, by observing, "Have you not heard the words of God Almighty

إِنَّ السَّمْعَ وَالْبَصَرَ وَالْفُؤَادَ كُلُّ أُولَٰئِكَ كَانَ عَنْهُ مَسْئُولًا

(Surely the hearing and sight and the heart will all be questioned?" (۱۷:۳۶"

d. Another

instance is the Imam's telling his (A) son, Isma'il, “When believers give evidence before you, endorse its verity,” quoting as a proof the verse:

يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَيُؤْمِنُ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ

“He (the Prophet (S) believes in God and believes the believers. ”(٩:٦١)

e. Concerning the validity of a slave being a muhallil for a woman divorced thrice, he (A) observes: “He is considered (fit to be) a husband, and God Almighty says in the Qur'an:

...حَتَّىٰ تَنكِحَ زَوْجًا غَيْرَهُ...

“... Unless she marries another husband ....” (٢:٢٣٠)

f. Another such argument is where the Imam (A) observes that a triple divorcee will not become halal again (for the husband who divorces her) through a temporary marriage (mut`ah), because God Almighty says:

فَإِن طَلَّقَهَا فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِمَا أَن يَتَرَاجَعَا

“Thus if he divorces her, there is no blame on the two if they reunite.” (٢:٢٣٠)

And there is no divorce in mut`ah

g. Similarly, concerning a person who had tripped and lost a nail and then bandaged the toe, he (A) said: “A person's duty in this and other similar instances is known from the Qur'an, which declares:

وَمَا جَعَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِى الدِّينِ مِنْ حَرَجٍ

“God has not ordained any hardship for you in the religion.” (٢٢:٧٨)

Then he (A) said: “Perform the mash over it” (the bandage).

h. The Imam (A) brings proof regarding the permissibility of marriage with a certain woman by quoting this verse from the Qur'an:

وَأُحِلَّ لَكُم مَّا وَرَاءَ ذَٰلِكُمْ

(And other than those mentioned (as prohibited) have been made halal for you." (۴:۲۴"

(i. Of such arguments is the one of the Imam (A

:concerning the invalidity of a slave's marriage, because the Qur'an says

عَبْدًا مَّمْلُوكًا لَّا يَقْدِرُ عَلَىٰ شَيْءٍ...

(An owned slave having no authority over anything ....” (۱۶:۷۵“

j. The Imam (A) cites the following verse from the Qur'an as a proof of the :permissibility of (eating the flesh of) certain species of animals

قُل لَّا أَجِدُ فِي مَا أُوحِيَ إِلَيَّ مُحَرَّمًا عَلَىٰ طَاعِمٍ يَطْعَمُهُ

Say: I do not end in that which has been revealed to me anything forbidden for an“ (eater to eat ....” (۶:۱۴۵

There are many other similar arguments of the Imams (A) that are based on Qur'anic verses, and these are scattered through the different chapters of fiqh and other .subjects

Arguments against the authority of the Zawahir

point

A group of traditionists have rejected the authority of the literal meanings of the .Qur'an, refusing to act on them for following reasons

The understanding of the Qur'an is limited to a selected few .۱

They argue that the ability to understand the Qur'an is limited to those who have been addressed by it. The protagonists of this view rely as their proof on a number of traditions concerning this issue, such as the mursal tradition of Shu`ayb ibn Anas :narrated from al-'Imam al Sadiq (A), reporting that the Imam (A) said to Abu Hanifah

أنت فقيه أهل العراق؟ قال: نعم. قال عليه السلام: فبأى شيء تفتيهم؟ قال : بكتاب الله وسنه نبيه. قال عليه السلام يا أبا حنيفه تعرف كتاب الله حق معرفته، وتعرف الناسخ من المنسوخ؟ قال : نعم. قال عليه السلام: يا أبا حنيفه لقد ادعيت علما - ويلك - ما جعل الله ذلك إلا عند أهل الكتاب الذين أنزل عليهم، ويلك ما

هو إلا عند الخاص من ذريه نبينا صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم: وما ورثک الله تعالى من كتابه حرفا.

Are you the faqih of the people of Iraq?" He replied: "Yes, I am." The Imam (A) said:" "On what basis do you pronounce your fatwa for them?" He replied: "On the basis of the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Prophet." The Imam said: "O Abu Hanifah, do you comprehend the Qur'an the way it should be comprehended, and do you recognize the nasikh and the mansukh?" He replied, "Yes".

The Imam (A) said: "O Abu Hanifah, you certainly profess having knowledge! Woe to you! God has not kept this knowledge except with the people of the Book and they on whom it has been sent down (i.e. the Ahl al-Bayt). Woe to you! This knowledge is with none except the chosen of our Prophet's (S) progeny, and God has not bequeathed a word to you from His Book".

The following tradition is narrated by Zayd al-Shahham in this relation:

وفی روایه زید الشحام, قال:

دخل قتاده على أبی جعفر، فقال له: انت فقیه أهل البصره؟ فقال :هکذا یزعمون. فقال علیه السلام بلغنی أنک تفسر القرآن. قال:نعم . إلى أن قال یا قتاده إن کنت قد فسرت القرآن من تلقاء نفسک فقد هلکت وأهلکت، وإن کنت قد فسرته من الرجال فقد هلکت وأهلکت، یا قتاده - ویحک - إنما یعرف القرآن من خوطب به.

Qatadah visited Abu Ja'far (A) and the Imam (A) asked him: "Are you the faqih of the people of

Basrah?" He replied: "This is what they think." The Imam (A) then said: "I have come to ".know that you expound (tufassiru) the Qur'an." He replied: "Yes, I do

The tradition continues until where) the Imam (A) said:"O Qatadah, if you have) expounded the Qur'an in accordance with your own views, then you have certainly perished and have also caused others to perish, and if you have expounded it in accordance with the views of others, then you have perished and have caused others to perish. Woe to you! No one knows the Qur'an except those who have been ".addressed by it

Answer: The meaning of these and similar traditions is that the comprehension of the Qur'an mentioned in them implies comprehending it completely, knowing both its literal and hidden meanings, along with its nasikh and mansukh, and this is limited to those who have been addressed by it. The first tradition explicitly conveys this meaning. Thus the question asked in this tradition was about the full comprehension .of the Qur'an and about differentiating between the nasikh and the mansukh

The Imam's (A) censure of Abu Hanifah was due to his claim of possessing that knowledge. As to the second tradition, it contains the word `tafsir' which means `unveiling' (kashf al-qina'), and therefore it does not include the acceptance of literal meanings, because they are not concealed so as to require unveiling. This is also borne out by the explicit traditions mentioned earlier that understanding of the Qur'an is not limited

to the Infallible Imams (A). Moreover the Imam's statement in the mursal tradition (of Shu'ayb ibn Anas) in which he says:

وما ورثك الله تعالى من كتبه حرفا.

God Almighty has not bequeathed to you a word from His Book,

also proves the same, for it means that God has chosen the Awsiya' (A) of His prophet (S) for inheriting the Qur'an, and this is the meaning of the verse.

ثُمَّ أَوْرَثْنَا الْكِتَابَ الَّذِينَ اصْطَفَيْنَا مِنْ عِبَادِنَا

"Then We bequeathed the Book on those of Our servants We chose ...." (۳۵:۳۲)

Therefore, the knowledge of the Qur'an's reality is exclusively with the Imams (A) and others do not have a share in it. This is the meaning of the mursal tradition (of Shu'ayb ibn Anas); otherwise, would it be reasonable to think that Abu Hanifah did not comprehend anything of the Qur'an including and other similar other verses which are explicit in their meaning? There is really a very large number of traditions which prove that such complete knowledge is particular to the Imams (A), and some of them have been mentioned earlier.

۲. The prohibition of tafsir bi al-ray

It is argued that the acceptance of the Qur'an's meanings is tantamount to tafsir bi al-ray (interpreting the Qur'an according to subjective opinion), and there are mutawattir traditions, narrated both by Sunnis and Shi'ah, which forbid such a practice.

Answer: As said, `tafsir' implies unveiling, and this does not include the taking of literal meanings of the verses, because such a meaning is not something hidden that has to be uncovered. Moreover, even of

we should consider this as tafsir, it is not tafsir bi al-ray for it to come in the purview of the mutawatir traditions forbidding it. On the contrary, it is a tafsir in accordance with .the common usage of words

Therefore, one who, for example, translates a sermon of Nahj al-balaghah in accor... dance with the ordinarily understood meanings of its words and by using the indications available in the sermon and outside it, his doing so will not be considered tafsir bi al-ray, and al-'Imam al-Sadiq (A) points this out when he says: "People have solely perished on account of the mutashabih, because they could not comprehend its meaning and reality, interpreting its meaning in accordance with their views and seeking thereby to relieve themselves of the need to ask the Awsiya', who could have ".informed them

It is probable that the meaning of tafsir bi al-ray is independence from referring to the Imams (A) in giving fatwa, although they are companions to the Qur'an in regard to .the obligation of adherence to the two and as the ultimate authority

Therefore, if a person acts in accordance with the general statements (al-`umum) of the Qur'an without accepting the views of the Imams (A) in determining and limiting (taqyid and takhsis) the jurisdiction of these statements, it will be considered as tafsir bi al-ra'y. On the whole, the adoption of literal meanings after a due search for internal and external indications (qara'in) present in the Qur'an and the traditions, or for a

rational proof, can not only be not considered tafsir bi al ra'y, it cannot be considered .`tafsir' as such

As mentioned earlier, the aforementioned traditions indicate that the Qur'an should be referred to and acted upon, and it is evident that such reference implies the acceptance of its literal meanings. Accordingly, when the relevant traditions are reconciled, tafsir bi al-ray ought to be understood as implying something other than .acting in accordance with the literal meanings

The mystery of the meanings of the Qur'an .۳

It is said that the Qur'an contains sublime and mysterious meanings and this quality of it is a hurdle in comprehending its meanings and fully grasping its import. To be certain, there are some books of the ancients whose meanings cannot be comprehended except by knowledgeable experts; accordingly, how could the Qur'an, which contains all the knowledge regarding both the past and the future, be ?understood

Answer: It is true that the Qur'an certainly contains the knowledge of the past and the future, and comprehending it from the Qur'an is doubtlessly restricted to the Ahl al-Bayt (A). However, this does not contravene the fact that the Qur'an has literal meanings understandable by anyone acquainted with the Arabic language and its rules, which one may act upon once they become clear after due research for .supporting indications

The knowledge that the literal meaning is not intended .۴

It may be said that we know in a mujmal way (i.e. without knowing all the specific details) that there exist restrictive proofs (mukhassisat and muqayyidat) which limit the application of the general statements (`umumat and itlaqat) of the Qur'an. This

means that some of its literal meanings are certainly not what are intended, for such .general statements have been restricted in their jurisdiction

However, those literal meanings which are not intended are not specifically known so as to enable us to confine us to those particular instances. As a result of this, all the literal meanings of the Qur'an and all its general statements become indistinct (mujmal) incidentally, though they are not in fact such essential. Consequently, it is not valid to act according to them, as a measure of caution against acting in violation of .(the real (commands of God

Answer: This mujmal knowledge (that there are some general statements whose literal meaning is not the intended one) can act as a hindrance to accepting all the literal meanings when one resolves to act in accordance with them without a due .investigation regarding their real import

But after the mukallaf (a person responsible for his religious duties) investigates and discovers such instances to the extent of gaining a mujmal knowledge of their presence in the Qur'an, the hindrance posed by the prior mujmal knowledge is removed, and it fails to have any effect. Thereupon, there remains no hindrance to .acting upon the literal meanings

The same thing is true of the Sunnah, where we also know that there are proofs which limit the jurisdiction of its general statements. Hence, had the mujmal knowledge (regarding the zawahir of the Qur'an) been a hindrance in the way of accepting its literal meanings

even after such knowledge is rendered ineffective, it would also be a hindrance in .accepting the literal meanings of traditions

Not only that, it would stop us from applying the Rule of Bara'ah (the presumption of absence of duty) in situations where doubts concerning the presence of a duty (al-shubuhat al-hukmiyyah) arise in the obligatoriness (wujub) or imperamissibility (hurmah) of something. This because every mukallaf knows is a mujmal way the presence of compulsory duties in the Shari'ah, and this mujmal knowledge (in accordance with the reasoning of the opponents of zawahir) could result in applying caution (ihtiyat) in all doubtful cases of duties pertaining to obligations and .prohibitions. However, we know for certain that caution is not wajib in them

It is true that age group of traditionists have considered caution wajib in cases of doubts concerning the presence of prohibition (al-shubuhat al-tahrimiyyah) because they imagined that the traditions ordering restraint and caution prove restraint and caution in cases of al-shubuhat al-tahrimiyyah. But this opinion of theirs is not based on the mujmal knowledge warding the presence of compulsory duties in the Shari'ah, because if it were so they would have considered caution obligatory in case of doubt .regarding the obligatoriness of something (al-shubuhat al-wujubiyyah) as well

However, as far as we know, no one has considered caution compulsory in such cases. The sole secret of caution not being wajib in these and other similar instances is that mujmal knowledge is at times `dissolved' as a result of success

in acquiring the knowledge (of specifics), and the dissolution of the mujmal knowledge renders it ineffective. For a further explanation, the reader should refer to our book .ajwad al-taqrirat

The prohibition of following the mutashabihat .۵

The opponents of acting on the zawahir point out that the Qur'anic `verses forbid the :following of the mutashabihat. God Almighty says

مِنْهُ آيَاتٌ مُّحْكَمَاتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ وَأُخَرُ مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ فِی قُلُوبِهِمْ زَيْغٌ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَابَهَ مِنْهُ...

In it are muhkam (clear) verses which are the foundation of the Book, and other" verses which are mutashabih. As for those in whose hearts is deviation, they follow its (mutashabih (ambiguous) verses ...." (۳:۷

The term mutashabih also includes literal meanings or, at least, the possibility of its .including literal meanings makes them incapable of being accepted as authority

Answer: The word mutashabih has a perspicuous meaning, and there is no ambiguity or vagueness in it. It means a word having two or more meanings that stand in the same degree of nearness in relation to that word. Thus when such a word is used in a .verse, the possibility arises that any one of these meanings may be actually intended

For this reason, it is wajib to observe restraint in giving a judgement in favour of any of the meanings unless there is an indication to specify it. Accordingly, a word having a .single literal meaning is not considered mutashabih

If we condescend to accept that the word mutashabih is itself ambiguous, and that there exists a possibility of its including literal meanings, our

doing so does not prevent us from acting in accordance with the literal meanings. This is after the practice of rational persons (sirat al-`uqala) which sanctions the acceptance of the literal meaning of a speech or writing. Therefore, a sole possibility is incapable of preventing this practice from being acted upon, for it requires a categorical proof in order to do so.

Otherwise, this practice will undoubtedly be followed. For this reason, a master is able to prove his servant's fault if the latter acts against the literal meanings of the former's speech, and it is valid for the master to punish him for the violation. Similarly, the servant may justify himself vis-à-vis his master if he has acted in accordance with the literal meaning of his master's words where it is opposed to his real intent. On the whole, this practice is followed in accepting the literal meanings, unless there exists a categorical proof against it.

۶. The occurrence of tahrif in the Qur'an

The occurrence of tahrif (textual corruption, or loss) in the Qur'an prevents us from accepting the literal meanings because a possibility of there being, alongside the literal meanings, helping indications determining their real intent exists, and these indications might have been lost due to tahrif

Answer: We reject the claim of occurrence of tahrif in the Qur'an, and have earlier presented our argument concerning it. (۱)There we said that the traditions commanding us to refer to the Qur'an are by themselves a proof negating tahrif. Even if we condescend to presume the occurrence of tahrif,

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۱- The author has discussed in detail the issue of tahrif in this book (al-Bayan fi tafsir al-Qur'an) in the chapter "siyanat al-Qur'an min al-tahrif" pp. ۱۹۷-۲۸۵.

we are obliged by these traditions to act in accordance with the Qur'an even after the .presumption of occurrence of tahrif

The conclusion that follows from this discussion is that it is necessary to act on the literal meanings of the Qur'an; that the Qur'an is the basis of the Shari'ah; and that .the narrated Sunnah will not be acted upon when it opposes the Qur'an

The Methodology of Tafsir

Tafsir' means the elucidation of the intent of God Almighty in the Holy Qur'an.` Therefore, it is neither permissible in this regard to rely on conjectures (zunun) or on one's preferences (istihsan), nor on anything whose validity has not been established by reason or the Shari'ah. This is because following conjectures and attributing :anything to God without His permission is forbidden. God Almighty says

قُلْ آللَّهُ أَذِنَ لَكُمْ ۖ أَمْ عَلَى اللَّهِ تَفْتَرُونَ

(Say: `Has God permitted you, or do you forge a lie against God?'" (۱۰:۵۹"

وَلَا تَقْفُ مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ

(And follow not that of which you have no knowledge." (۱۷:۳۶"

There are other such verses and traditions that forbid acting without knowledge, and there are a sufficiently large (mustafidah) number of traditions from both Sunni and .Shi'ah sources forbidding tafsir bi al-ray

This makes it clear that it is not valid to follow the tafsir of any exegete, irrespective of his being rightful in his creed or otherwise, because it amounts to following .conjecture, and conjecture is not a substitute for knowledge

The Sources of Tafsir

It is necessary for an exegete to: follow the literal meanings as understood by a

linguistically competent Arab (and we have already explained that literal meanings are authoritative), or follow the dictates of sound reason, for reason is an inward authority in the same way as the Prophet (S) is an outward authority (hujjah), or follow the traditions established to have been narrated from the Mu'sumun (the Prophet [S], Fatimah [A] , and the Imams [A]), because they are the authorities to be referred to in the religion (al-maraji` fi al-Din). The Prophet (S) declared the duty of .making recourse to them when he said

إنی تارق فیکم الثقلین کتاب الله وعترتی أهل بیتی، ما إن تمسکتم بهما لن تضلوا بعدی أبدا.

Verily, I am leaving behind two weighty things amongst you: the Book of God and my (Family, my Ahl al-Bayt. If you hold on to them, you will never go astray after me.(۱)

There is no doubt that the statements of the Imams (A) are established when narrated through a definite chain of transmission free from doubt. Similarly, there is no doubt that they are not proved when narrated by a weak (daif) chain which does not possess the requirements of credibility. Are their (A) statements proven through a chain creating presumption (tariq zanni) when supported by a definite proof (dalil .qati)? The scholars differ in this regard

A doubt is raised here concerning the authority of khabar al wahid (a tradition which is not mutawatir) narrated by trustworthy narrators from the Ma'sumun (A) regarding the tafsir of the Qur'an. The reason offered is that the

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For the Sunni sources containing Hadith al-Thaqalayn, see: Musnad Ahmad ibn - ۱ Hanbal, part III, pp. ۱۴, ۱۷, ۲۶, ۵۹ from Abu Said al-Khudri; iv, pp. ۳۶۶, ۳۷۱ from Zayd ibn Arqam; v, pp. ۱۸۲, ۱۸۹ from Zayd ibn Thabit. See also al-Darimi, Sunan, "kitab fada'il al-Qur'an," II, ۴۳۱; al-Suyuti in al-Jami 'al-saghir, from al Tabarani, from Zayd ibn Thabit, evaluates it as sahih ; al-`Allamah al-Manawi, Sharh, II, p.۱۵; al-Hakim, al-Mustadrak, III, ۱۰۹, from Zayd ibn Arqam, evaluates it as sahih; al-Muttaqi al-Hindi, Kanz al-'ummal, "bab al-i'tisam bi al-Kitab wa al-Sunnah, " Da'irat al-Ma'arif al-`Uthmaniyyah, i, ۲۵۳, ۳۳۲. Others who have reported it are Muslim in his Sahih; Abu Ya'la, al-Hafiz

`Abd al-`Aziz ibn al-'Akhdar, and many others. For a detailed study of its sources see .Hamid Husayn al-Hindi, `Abaqat al anwar

implication, of the authority of khabar al-wahid, or some other proof (dalil) leading to presumption (zann), is that it is obligatory to follow it in a case when one is ignorant .about the actual law as if the law were known for certain

Such an approach is applicable nowhere except in regard to a hadith concerning a law of the Shari'ah or a subject relating to such a law. This condition is at times not present in a khabar al-wahid narrated from the Ma'sumun (A) in regard to tafsir (for such traditions may relate to subjects having no relation whatsoever with the laws of .(.the Shari'ah, such as doctrines, historical events, etc

This objection is contrary to fact. It has been explained in discussions on usul al-fiqh that the meaning of the authority (hujjiyyah) of the proofs that bring only presumption (and not certainty) about the actual fact, is that such presumptive proofs have been made binding substitutes for definite proofs by the Lawgiver (this is called certainty .(through ta`abbud, i.e. in observance of Divine sanction

Thus, a channel whose credibility is approved by the Lawgiver's sanction is as good as a source resulting in certainty, despite the fact that it lacks the intrinsic capacity to produce certainty. Hence all the effects of certain knowledge will follow from this channel, and it will be as correct to report (regarding non-legal matters) on its authority as it is correct to do so on the basis of actual knowledge; it will not be

.considered a statement without knowledge

We are led to this conclusion by the practice prevalent among all reasonable persons (`uqala'). Such persons consider a channel of approved credibility similar to actual .knowledge, without making any difference between the effects of the rule

For instance, the possession, of a thing by someone is regarded as a proof of his ownership by the people, despite the fact that it can give rise only to presumption that the possessor is its owner, and they allow on its basis all the effects of ownership, and report without deserving any blame that he is the owner of that thing. And this .common practice has not been disapproved by the Lawgiver

Of course, it is true that a trustworthy tradition or any other credible channel should possess all the conditions of credibility. Among such conditions is that the tradition should not be of known falsity, because something known to be false cannot .reasonably possess the marks of credibility or enjoy the Lawgiver's sanction

Therefore, those traditions which are contrary to consensus or definite Sunnah, or the Qur'an, or the dictates of sound reason, will certainly not be considered credible, although they may possess other requirements of credibility. There is also no difference here between traditions relating to a rule of the Shari'ah and those relating .to non-legal subjects

The basis of this argument against the credibility of khabar al wahid is that however trustworthy a narrator may be, the tradition narrated by him is not secure from being contrary

to the truth, because there is at least a possibility of his having made a mistake, especially where there are a large number of links in the chain of transmission. Hence, it is necessary to have some grounds establishing credibility that remove such a .possibility, making it as if non-existent

However, in the case of certainty about the falsity of a tradition, which is known to be contrary to the truth, such a certainty cannot be evaded on the basis of the Law-giver's sanction (ta`abbud), for the intrinsic quality of certainty is to reveal the truth .and its validity is established as necessary by reason

Therefore it is necessary to limit the grounds of the credibility of khabar al-wahid to those traditions which are not known to be false or contrary to the truth. The same rule applies to other reliable channels of information. This issue has a bearing upon many other issues of the kind, and on it are based replies to many doubts and .criticisms. The reader should understand it well

Limiting the Jurisdiction of the Qur'an by Khabar al-Wahid

Point

When the credibility of khabar al-wahid has been established by a definite proof (dalil qati), is it possible to limit the jurisdiction of the general statements of the Holy Qur'an by a khabar al-wahid? The prevalent (mashhur) view among the scholars considers it valid. A group of Sunni scholars opposes this view, and some of them reject it .unconditionally

Isa ibn Aban states: "If a general statement of the Qur'an has already been limited` ,by a definite proof

it is valid to further limit it by a khabar al-wahid; otherwise it is not valid." Al-Karkhi states: "If the Book's general statement has been limited by a separate proof (dalil munfasil) it is valid to limit it further by a khabar al-wahid and not otherwise." Al-Qadi (Abu Bakr has refrained from giving an opinion in this regard.(١)

We accept the prevalent view, and the ground for doing so is, the khabar al-wahid as presumed enjoys definite credibility, and this implies that it is wajib to act according to .it as long as there is no hindrance to doing so

Doubts and Opinions

The imagined hindrance to acting in accordance with khabar al wahid is not based on .valid reasons. Some main objections and the replies to them are mentioned below

١. It is argued that the Holy Qur'an is the word of God Almighty which has been revealed to His Noble Prophet (S); this is a definite fact and beyond doubt. However, a khabar al-wahid has no certainty of being in accordance with the truth, nor is there a guarantee of its contents being the authentic word of the Ma'sum, because there is at least a possibility of the narrator's mistake. In the light of this, it is not reasonable to .abandon a thing which is certain for a proof containing a possibility of error

The reply to this is that although the authenticity of the Qur'an is definite, it is not certain whether its general statements represent the actual law. It is obligatory to act

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١- Al-'Amidi, Usul al- 'ahkam, II, ٤٧٢.

in accordance with the general statements because they are the literal meanings, and it is accepted as a reasonable practice not disapproved by the Lawgiver to follow .literal imports

It is quite obvious that this common practice, which proves the authority of literal meanings, is limited to cases where there exists no indication (qarinah) contrary to the literal import, irrespective of whether the indication is attached (muttasil) to the general statement or is separate (munfasil) from it. Therefore, when there is an indication conflicting with the literal import, it is obligatory to forgo the literal meaning .and to act in accordance with the indication

Hence there is no other alternative to limiting the general statements of the Qur'an by khabar al-wahid after a definite proof of its credibility. It means that the khabar al-wahid has originated from the Ma'sum, though its authenticity is based on ta`abbud and not on fact. In other words, we may say, though the authenticity of the Qur'an is certain, we have only presumption regarding its real intent, and there is no reasonable impediment to forgoing a proof which gives presumption for another .similar proof whose credibility is known for certain

It is argued that authentic traditions of the Ma'sumeen (A) command us to compare .۲ the traditions with the Qur'an, and that those which oppose it should be discarded and not considered their word. A limiting tradition (al-khabar al-khass) conflicting with a general statement of the Qur'an comes within the purview of such traditions; thus it

.becomes obligatory to discard it as unauthentic

The reply to this is that, first, we should clarify the meaning of `contradiction' and `opposition.' Customary indications applied in comprehending the intent of the Qur'an are not considered by custom as opposing the Qur'an in any manner, and a limiting .proof (al-dalil al khass) is an indication which elucidates the intent of a general proof

Two statements contradict each other when people are unable to understand from them the intent of their speaker if both the statements come from him. On this basis, a limiting khabar al-wahid cannot be considered as contradicting a general statement .of the Qur'an; rather, it elucidates its intent

This is also further confirmed by our knowledge that a large number of traditions have been issued by the Ma'sumun (A) that limit the general statements of the Qur'an. Now, should this limiting be considered as contradiction to the Qur'an, the following :words of the Ma'sumun (A) will be incorrect

ما خالف قول ربنا لم نقله، أو هو زخرف، أو باطل.

That which opposes the word of our Lord, has not been said by us. It is absurd or .false

This statement of them (A) proves that the limiting of the jurisdiction of the general .statements of the Qur'an does not involve any contradiction

Furthermore, the Ma'sumun (A) have laid down agreement with the Qur'an of one of two contradicting traditions as a criterion for preferring one of them to the other. This implies, that a tradition which is not in consonance with the literal

general statements of the Qur'an is creditable in itself, for it is obvious that if this tradition were opposed to the Qur'an in a manner that reconciliation were impossible, it would fail to be credible in itself, and thereby leave no room for conflict and .preference

Therefore, there is no alternative to accepting that the meaning of a tradition's not being in consonance with the Qur'an is that it is possible to reconcile the two in an .acceptable manner by limiting the general Qur'anic statements

The conclusion is that a tradition limiting the general Qur'anic statements is in itself credible and it is necessary to act in accordance with it, except when it is faced with .another tradition contradicting it

It is argued that if it is valid to limit Qur'anic statements with khabar al-wahid, it will .۳ also be valid to abrogate the Qur'an with it. But since to do so is certainly not valid, it follows that limiting the Qur'anic statements with it is also invalid. The basis of such a logical linkage is that abrogation (as explained in the chapter on naskh) means limiting the Qur'anic statements with respect to a specific period of time, which ends with the .(arrival of the abrogating proof (al-dalil al nasikh

Consequently the abrogation of a Qur'anic statement does not mean its actual annulment, but only a formal extrinsic abolition. The limiting of the jurisdiction of general Qur'anic laws in regard to the instances of its application is similar to limiting it to

a particular period, both being forms of limitation. Therefore, if the first is valid, the .second, too, would be valid

The reply to this is that the difference between the two forms of limitation is the presence of, a definite consensus (al-'ijma` al-qati) prohibiting the abrogation of general Qur'anic laws by khabar al-wahid and had it not been for this ijma`, the abrogation of Qur'anic statements by a trustworthy khabar al-wahid would have been as valid as the limiting of the general jurisdiction of Qur'anic statements. We have mentioned earlier that though the Qur'an enjoys definite authenticity of source (qati al-sanad), its actual import is not known for certain, and there is no impediment .to forgoing it by accepting a khabar al-wahid whose credibility is definitely known

It is to be noted that the above mentioned ijma` is not based on mere ta`abbud, but rests on a rational basis. This is because some matters are such that should they be true in external reality, they are bound to be widely reported (mutawatir), and if a matter of great significance is reported only by some, it is evidence of the falsity or .error of the report

The proofs in favour of the reliability of khabar al-wahid do not apply to such reports. It is on this basis that we said that a text is not proved to be a part of the Qur'an on the basis of khabar al-wahid. For there is no doubt that the abrogation of the Qur'an is not an

.affair limited to a particular group of Muslims to the exclusion of others

Hence, had abrogation occurred, a very large number of traditions (akhbar mutawatirah) would have narrated it. Now, if a single tradition reports it, it will be the proof of its falsity or error. With this exposition, the difference between the limitation of the Qur'anic statements by khabar al-wahid and the abrogation of them by such traditions becomes obvious, and the logical linkage claimed between the two is .thereby refuted

About center

In the name of Allah

هَلْيَسْتَوِيالَّذِينَيَعْلَمُونَوَالَّذِينَلَايَعْلَمُونَ

?Are those who know equal to those who do not know

al-Zumar: ۹

:Introduction

Ghaemiyeh Computer Research Institute of Isfahan, from ۲۰۰۷, under the authority of Ayatollah Haj SayyedHasanFaqihImami (God blesses his soul), by sincere and daily efforts of university and seminary elites and sophisticated groups began its activities .in religious, cultural and scientific fields

:Manifesto

Ghaemiyeh Computer Research Institute of Isfahan in order to facilitate and accelerate the accessibility of researchers to the books and tools of research, in the field of Islamic science, and regarding the multiplicity and dispersion of active centers in this field

and numerous and inaccessible sources by a mere scientific intention and far from any kind of social, political, tribal and personal prejudices and currents, based on performing a project in the shape of (management of produced and published works from all Shia centers) tries to provide a rich and free collection of books and research papers for the experts, and helpful contents and discussions for the educated generation and all classes of people interested in reading, with various formats in the .cyberspace

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(propagating the culture and teachings of Thaqalayn (Quran and Ahlulbayt p.b.u.t-

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replacing useful contents with useless ones in the cellphones, tablets and computers-

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acting according to the legal licenses-

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.It's obvious that all the responsibilities are due to the author

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We would appreciate the centers, institutes, publications, authors and all honorable .friends who contributed their help and data to us to reach the holy goal we follow

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